U.S. ARMY CHAPLAIN CENTER AND SCHOOL
FORT WADSWORTH, SI, NEW YORK

# THE MILITARY CHAPLAIN COUNSELING THE MILITARY/DEPENDENT YOUTH AND THEIR PARENTS

A RESEARCH PAPER SUBMITTED TO
THE RESIDENT DEPARTMENT
CHAPLAIN(LTC) ERMINE TODD, JR.

BY

CHAPLAIN(MAJ) CHARLES T. CLANTON

1 MARCH 1975

# I. INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest challenges in the world today for a minister is to be a military chaplain. For those who can live with constant change, both in their job assignments and their location, it offers a unique opportunity to work with people from all segments of society.

One of the greatest areas of need in this field is that of counseling the young soldier and the teenaged dependent of the military families. With the increasing demands of society, these young people find themselves constantly trying to establish their personal identity and grow into independent adults. Because of their mobility it is at the same time very necessary and very difficult to achieve maturity. In this paper we will look at the background and unique problems of these two segments of our society.

## II. COUNSELING THE TEENAGER AND HIS PARENTS

One of the greatest challenges this counselor has encountered as a counselor is trying to understand and counsel with the teenaged military dependent. Why is it so difficult to deal with this particular group?

Gallagher and Harris in their book, Emotional Problems of Adolescents, say:

> If there is one single thing to remember about adolescents, it is that they are overcome by their personalities. They are so preoccupied with developing their own personalities, so on guard against being pushed around, and yet so vacillating in the capacity to be themselves, that one cannot hope to successfully deal with them or to understand them unless one recognizes this preoccupation and pays much attention to them as one does to whatever it is that one is trying to advise, to teach, or to correct. The adolescent is so aware of the need to develop himself--his own personality--that he instinctively resists any effort of yours to impose on him your will or your ways, though left alone he may imitate you.[1]

Ginott, in his book, Between Parent and Child, says that most parents want to help their children and want to see them happy and safe, yet have a difficult time in trying to deal with them. He points out that the teenager is trying to appear grown-up, independent, and self-sufficient and they resent unsolicited attention and advise. They are like a person who wants a loan but wishes he were rich-- and no matter how helpful the parent is he will still be resented by the teenager. Giving a teenager advise is seen by him as

being bossed around, and they resent it. They are desperately seeking autonomy and if you interfere with them you are seen as an enemy![2]

If we are going to work effectively with teenagers, either as counselors or as parents, we must learn to be sensitive to their needs and concerns. Many parents have felt they were doing very well in raising their children only to see them change overnight into someone quite different. It is quite a shock to see a pleasant child turn into an unruly adolescent. It is especially hard to tolerate the appearence of many annoying mannerisms such as: nail-biting, nose-picking, finger-drumming, foot-tapping and many of the other unusual things they begin to do.[3]

This drastic change that is often seen in our teenagers would be almost unbearable to concerned parents if it were not for the fact that there is a method in their madness. His behavior fits his developmental phase. The purpose of this time in his life is to loosen personality. His personality is undergoing necessary changes. From organization (childhood) through disorganization (adolesence) to reorganization (adulthood). This period of time helps the teenager to remake his personality and become the independent, self-sustaining adult that he needs to become to cope with his future.[4]

What should parents do in this situation? They must let them grow up even if it means that they will make mistakes and cause them many headaches along the way. The end result should be worth the effort![5]

Another big factor that causes the military dependent teenager problems during this period of his life is the fact that he is required to move quite often. Since the beginning of hostilities in Vietnam, many servicemen and their families have been required to move on the average of every two years or more often. Because of this the teenager who was already finding it hard to make new friends and adjust to his new responsibilities is tasked even more as his world is changed at this rapid pace. Gallagher states that "not all adolescents transplant easily. They are taken from their old friends and old school and thrust into a new situation. Some go through a long period of readjustment which is reflected in their poor performance in school."6

This counselor has observed that after several of these moves over a short period of time many young people develop a "whats the use" attitude about mixing and learning friends when they arrive at their new location. They realize that almost as soon as they make new friends and join the many activities that they enjoy, their fathers will get orders again and they will be faced with the pain of saying "good-bye" and starting over again. Many times this fact causes the teenager to become a loner and turn inward, or, if he has a good home life, to become more and more dependent on his parents. This delays this period of adolescent change that he must go through to achieve his much needed independence. They find themselves on the horns of a real dilemma. They want to declare

their independence, yet are more afraid than ever because of the uncertainty of their relationships with their peers.

Coupled with this frequent move cycle is the fact that the father has been required to be away from the family on short tours of one year in length on two or more occasions during the past eight years. This has made it necessary for the mother to keep the family going and has deprived the children of a father during critical times in their life when identification has been so important.

When we consider the inner tourmoil that these young people are going through, coupled with this "move every year or two cycle", is it any wonder that we have problems?

What can parents do in the face of all of this?

First, they can be aware of the teenager's problems and be sensitive to their needs. Too often, the parents throw up their hands at the first signs of conflict and make some pronouncement such as "shape-up kid-- you think you've got it tough, you should have seen what I had to go through when I was your age!" This doesn't make things better, it only makes the young person more rebellious because he realizes the parents lack of concern.

Parents can be good listeners. These young people have something to say and they need to be heard by those people they feel are important. We in this generation are all too anxious to give our young people things they desire, yet deny them the thing they need most-- ourselves.

As counselors to these young people, we must also be good listeners. Gallagher emphasizes that we must listen to

them through an active, rather than a passive, process and this very often calls for silence. When the teenager is letting his words flow and his feelings out, we should refrain from doing anything more than an occasional grunt or nod of approval. When he has had his say, then we are fee to speak.[7]

Quite probably, the most important thing we can do initially is to establish a positive relationship. This involves a transference of the adolescent's childhood admiration toward his parents to the listener, and constitutes the most powerful lever in helping an adolescent with his emotional problems.[8]

In concluding this section, Gallagher gives some practical help in the following quote:

> One method that is occasionally effective in counseling the adolescent is to confront him directly with what you feel is the true meaning of his problem. If it is obvious that he is attached to his mother and this is covering his problems you might simply use some simple, earthy, strong expression, such as "all wrapped up in your mother". To use the phrase "Oedipus complex" might not mean a whole lot to him!
>
> Dream reporting without interpretation if the young person remembers his dreams easily.
>
> In talking with a young person with a highly developed vocabulary wihch is used as a defence you should suggest using less sophisticated words--simple, earthy words that show feeling, rather than polite, fancy, evasive ones.
>
> Some young people tend to think in pictures. This takes patience and you should reassure them that there is no hurry. Ask them to describe, in detail, these pictorial ideas.
>
> Other methods include the manipulation of the environment, the type of support that anyone would give to a friend in trouble, the clear indication of an alliance with the adolescent in his struggle with his problems, direct advise when it is asked for and last, but not least, praise.[9]

## III. COUNSELING THE YOUNG SOLDIER (17-25 YEARS)

Over the past eight years as an Army chaplain, this counselor has counseled with thousands of young men in the various units he has served both in the United States, in Vietnam, in England and Germany. He has dealt with them during their basic training, in combat in Vietnam, in the rear areas of relative safety in Vietnam, and in garrison units in England and Germany.

The different type problems have been almost as numerous as the men involved. The most frequent problems were: homesickness in basic training; the fear of death; a search for spiritual meaning in life; and letters from wives and girlfriends proclaiming the sad news that they wanted a divorce or to break off the relationship; informing men of the death of close relatives and dealing with their grief.

Most of the men were 17-19 years of age and still in their adolescent development, struggling to find themselves in the midst of the new, strange, and many times traumatic environment of the military.

Let us first deal with the young soldier who is stationed in the United States. He experiences many difficulties in his transition from civilian to military life. His first step is his basic training, generally running from eight to ten weeks, followed by his advanced training in the speciality which he has chosen when he enlisted. After completing his advanced training which may run from eight weeks to as long as a year in some highly specalized fields he is assigned to

a permanent duty station. Let us first deal with this initial period of adjustment and the counseling situations that will be inevitable.

H.L. Bergsma in his article, "The Young Adult", describes the chaos that young people in the 17-25 age group find themselves in. He says they are constantly boiling and changing. They are going through a period of crystallization. They are trying out ways of coping with their experiences. The ways they know best are those learned from their parents, but the pressure is great to develop their own ways of handling experiences . This is especially important because at this age they need a sense of personal identity and because their environment, whether civilian or military, is so different than that of their parents when they were young adults.[10]

"The young adult is chaos-internally and externally. Confusion, vagueness, free-floating anxiety are the internal order of the day".[11]

This same unceasing battleground of emotional conflict exists for the serviceman as it does for the civilian. His problems neither vanish nor change greatly when he comes into the Army. Despite the sacrificial demands of some assignments the noteworty fact is that individuals seem to experience the same problems no matter where they are.[12]

The young man in the military runs into problems that he could have handled at home, but because of his unfamiliar

environment he needs help. When he seeks help he has the tendancy to depend too much on the advise of others and is too willing to put aside his own responsibilities for his life.[13]

What are the differences between men in the military and in civilian life? One of the major ones is the authority difficulties that many men face in the service. A civilian who has problems dealing with authority in that environment has an even more difficult time in the service. In the service he has military physicans, military lawyers, and others and he also has the military structure which he cannot escape from day or night. Everywhere he turns he sees authority.[14]

At least 70% of the young soldiers who were interviewed by this counselor during their first eight weeks of training said they could not get used to this authority--of people telling them what to do and when to do it. Many said they had very little discipline in their homes and this was a new experience for them.

The serviceman's problems are further complicated by the simple fact that he is cut off from loved ones at home. Problems that would normally be insignificant were he at home are blown out of proportion because he cannot handle them on a personal basis and must depend on the mails or making expensive long distance calls to solve them.[15]

Another real problem that usually shows up early in a mans career is guilt which he feels in having come into the military. Many times he enlisted in order to get away from a situation at home he couldn't cope with such as

overdependent parents or wife. Once he gets away--then receives mail from them telling how much they miss his and need him there-- he feels a great sense of guilt for having left them. Then he is faced with the reality that he signed a contract commiting himself to 2-3 years in service which he cannot walk away from.

Financial problems usuall crop-up at about the same time, especially if he is married and supporting a household at home plus his own personal needs. Too often he has not gotten all the information about what he will draw as a private in the Army, and when he gets that first paycheck it never seems to be as much as he anticipated it would be!

For the young man who has had some college training or is a college graduate other problems arise. He realizes that many of the sergeants who are giving him orders day and night and generally making life miserable for him, are, in fact, not as educated and sophisticated as he, and a real resentment grown in him over the long days of basic training. He feels since he has more education he should be telling the less educated what to do.

Moskos, in his book, The American Enlisted Man, says:

> Put in propositioned terms, the enlisted culture is derived from a social organization which underutilizes--or if one prefers, penalizes--middle-class individuals while simultaneously allowing persons of lower, or working class backgrounds, to participate with minimal acknowledgement of preexisting socioeducational handicaps. Such an enforced leveling of the classes has no parallel in any other existing institution in American society.[16]

Added to all these problems many young men realize after they have been in the Army a few days that it just

isn't what they thought it was going to be, and come seeking ways to get out and return to that civilian life that they now long for more than ever.

It is a common occurence after a few weeks to hear from some young soldier's mother either by phone or by letter, asking the chaplain to talk to her son. She has heard from someone that her son, who was a morally fine lad at home, is now drinking, smoking and seeing some questionable young ladies! What happens to these young fellows? The answer is usually that they are away from the restraints of home-- often for the first time. In the military there is little pressure exerted to hold the man in line morally. There is no longer any fear of old Mrs. Fraley across the street or down the block. There is no danger that he is going to get fired because the neighbors are talking. The truth is the soldier has to have his own dynamic inner ethic, if he is to be unscathed-- for not only is there little pressure to keep him in line-- there is a form of peer pressure toward immorality.[17]

If the young man has had religious training in his home and church, many times he will eventually find his way to the chaplain and find a new commitment to his old way of life.

Now let us deal with the young soldier overseas. When he goes overseas he is faced with many of the same problems as in the United States, but they are compounded because of distance factors. He feels even more cut-off than before from his family, and in many instances feels he is in another world.

Moskos says:

> The overseas situation for the single serviceman is, as would be expected, quite different than stateside. Bachelors live in the barracks buildings and patronize post facilities. But the lure of off-post activities is constant and strong. Thus one of the most ubiqutous features of military bases overseas is the adjacent locally-owned commercial establishments catering to the wants of the soldiers. These "boom-towns"--with their bars, laundries, tailor shops, massage parlors, and houses of prostitution--are a constituent part of the overseas community.[18]

In this setting the chaplain is besiged by young soldiers who have fallen in love with local girls and want to get married. They very seldom come for marriage counseling. They have made up their minds about getting married and simply want the chaplain to hold the ceremony. This is probably the most difficult counseling because the young man has a closed mind on the subject.

Many young men choose to simply live with a girl for several months or years with no real promise of marriage. The main problem comes when the serviceman receives orders to return to the United States. He has become attatched to the girl and though he admits he doesn't love her he feels responsible for her. At this point he comes seeking an answer to what he ought to do. He is usually convienced he doesn't want to get married but has a real sense of guilt because he has been together so long.

Here, the counselor has to put the question back to the serviceman and let him bear the responsibility for the decision.

## IV. CONCLUSION

We have tried to point out in this paper the great needs and problems which lie in the path of every young person between adolescents and adulthood. These young people are faced with changing values, world crises of all sorts from shortages in food and the threat of starvation to a world economy that seems to be heading for disaster. They are living with constant threats of war, over-population, and moral issues (such as abortion)--all of which will directly affect them in the very near future.

As counselors and concerned parents, we can help these young people by accepting them, loving them, listening to them, and guiding them.

FOOTNOTES

[1]J. Roswell Gallagher and Herbert I. Harris, Emotional Problems of Adolescents (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 8.

[2]Haim G. Ginott, Between Parent and Teenager, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1969), p. 20.

[3]Ibid., pp. 24-25.

[4]Ibid., p. 25.

[5]Gallagher and Harris, Emotional Problems of Adolescents, p. 10.

[6]Ibid., pp. 146-147.

[7]Ibid., p. 176.

[8]Ibid., pp. 177-178.

[9]Ibid., p. 186.

[10]H. L. Bergsma, "The Young Adult," The Chaplain Magazine, Washington, D.C. (1969), p.2.

[11]Ibid., p. 2.

[12]Thomas A. Harris, Counseling the Serviceman and His Family, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 17.

[13]Ibid., p. 19.

[14]Ibid., pp. 19-20.

[15]Ibid., p. 21.

[16]Charles C. Moskos, Jr., The American Enlisted Man, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970), p. 76.

[17]Harris, Counseling the Serviceman and His Family, p. 29.

[18]Moskos, The American Enlisted Man, pp. 84-85.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Becker, Russell J. Family Pastoral Care. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965.

Bergsma, H. L. "The Young Adult." The Chaplain Magazine, 1969, p. 2.

Clinebell, Howard J. Mental Health Through Christian Community, New York: Abingdon Press, 1965.

Gallagher, J. Roswell, and Harris, Herbert I. Emotional Problems of Adolescents. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Ginott, Haim G. Between Parent and Child. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1969.

_____ Between Parent and Teenager. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1969.

Harris, Thomas A. Counseling the Serviceman and His Family. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966.

Leslie, Gerald R. The Family in Social Context. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Moskos, Charles C., Jr. The American Enlisted Man. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970.

Oates, Wayne E. The Christian Pastor. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press. 1951.

Rogers, Carl R. Client-Centered Therapy. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1951.

Satir, Virginia. Conjoint Family Therapy. Palo Alto: Science and Behavior Books, Inc., 1967.